

The Future of Natomas Flood Protection

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by Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui

Hurricane Katrina awakened the entire nation to something that we have long since recognized in the Sacramento region: investments must be made to provide the highest possible level of long-term flood protection. We sit at the confluence of two great rivers: the American and Sacramento. While we enjoy this beautiful backdrop, we are also vigilant in our efforts to keep the region safe and secure.

With the Federal Government taking the lead to develop and implement national standards, we have begun to re-examine how we evaluate and build our flood protection infrastructure. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to flood protection, as each region at risk has unique challenges. As the nation's best and brightest determine the best-possible standards of evaluation and protection, we in Sacramento are poised to meld new policies with hard work and local investment dollars.

The Natomas Basin, home to 70,000 residents, must be protected in the event of a flood. I have always been, and will continue to be, a leading advocate for flood protection in the Sacramento region. I will take steps to broker new partnerships between stakeholders at every level, and ensure that we have the most efficient and advantageous combination of resources to achieve enduring flood protection.

A prime example of such a partnership is the Folsom Dam Joint Federal Project (JFP). In a post-Katrina world, as standards are evolving, the Folsom Dam JFP demonstrates how we can adapt and invest in projects that will bring far-reaching benefits to the region. The JFP utilizes the resources and expertise of two federal agencies, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as the local input from the State and the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency.

We have been waiting since 1986, when storms pushed floodwaters to the brink of our levees, launching a new era of flood protection. The authorization and completion of the JFP will put us on track to enjoy over a 200-year level of protection. Slated to be completed by 2015, six years earlier than anticipated, the project will build a spillway adjacent to Folsom Dam.

Not only will we have increased flood protection, we are showing the rest of the nation how representatives from every level of government can come together for the betterment of our region. The JFP has an unprecedented level of support from all of the stakeholders involved, support that will be evidenced at the Jan. 11, 2008 groundbreaking of this landmark project.

Last year marked a significant achievement for flood protection in Sacramento. Under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), the Folsom Dam JFP was approved as a new project and authorized to receive \$683 million. Despite a veto by the President, WRDA became law on Nov. 8, 2007.

But, of course, just the JFP is not enough. We know that we have a responsibility to provide stronger levees along our rivers. Public safety has to be our highest priority, and we must constantly raise the bar to assure we meet this goal. Natomas is safer than it was ten years ago, and better standards and methods will ensure that it is safer ten years from now.

We have made great strides in our regional flood protection, but we must keep progress moving forward. The Corps of Engineers, our federal partners in flood protection, will require high standards for levee certification and take a system-wide approach to our flood protection. While this presents new challenges, it will pay off in the long term for everyone. As we were shown in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the old standards simply were not sufficient. By establishing higher standards now, we will make significant investments that will usher in an era of better flood protection.

Our forefathers had the vision to invest in the infrastructure that protects the community that we all recognize as a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. With our local, state and federal partners firmly on board and an eye to long-term, holistic planning, we can truly raise the level of protection now and for generations to come.